

Give It to the Poor and Follow Me, or Give It to Me and Be Proud of Your Poverty

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LEE'S SUMMIT, Mo.—A young man came to Jesus and asked, "Good Master, what good thing must I do to inherit eternal life?" He was a rich young man, and after some discussion Jesus got to the nub of the stumbling block. "Go, sell all you have, give it to the poor, and come and follow me."

Therefore, to fulfill God's will in our lives and to assure eternal life, we all need to sell what we have, give it to the poor, rely totally on God for our sustenance, and that's how we follow Jesus. Right?

Wrong!

Before anyone "steps out on faith" and impoverishes himself and thinks he is doing God a service by relying on the charity of others who have not impoverished themselves, remember that those instructions were given to one man, one time, because of a specific stumbling block for the purpose of a specific calling. It's dangerous to generalize based on this one specific.

Paul never demanded that the wealthy Philemon sell all his possessions. Jesus did not demand that the wealthy Zacchaeus give all his wealth away after he proclaimed he would he would give half. We have no record of Joseph of Arimathea divesting himself of his great wealth. Lydia, as far as we know, remained a successful businesswoman.

Abraham became very wealthy as a result of God's blessings, and so did Jacob and also Joseph the son of Jacob. Job might have lost all his wealth at a trying time in his life, but God restored it twofold at a later date.

If God has given you prosperity, no one has a right to make you feel guilty about it. At the same time prosperity does demand some obligations.

The first obligation is to recognize the source of your prosperity and appreciate it. Clearly, God is the ultimate source of blessings, but often overlooked is a little appreciation for your customers and/or employer and the support of family. And if you received the reward of your labor from hard work and sacrifice—and risk-taking—you can take some credit for that.

You must also realize that money is not your god, nor your source of security, nor the definition of your identity, nor a means to control others. It is entirely possible that the rich young man whom Jesus loved was making one or more of these errors.

And we must also realize that prosperity itself can be a ministry. There seems to be an implicit assumption in some quarters that impoverishing oneself in the name of religion is a sign of nobility and that building wealth is a sign of selfishness. In the world where I live, it is those with wealth who create employment opportunities that keeps people from being poor. It is those with wealth who invest in new ideas, contribute to worthy causes, pay taxes to fund the essential functions of government, and carry their own weight so that they do not become a burden on their children or strangers.

Maybe the best way a wealthy person can serve in ministry is not to give it all away, but to invest his capital in a new enterprise that can provide meaningful, livable and sustainable employment opportunities so that fewer citizens need to rely on the charity of others.

This side of the Kingdom the poor will always be with us. But the only way to end poverty is to create wealth. Don't let anyone discourage you from doing so.